

REMARKS

Prior to this preliminary amendment, claims 34-40, 42-47, 51-56, 59-72, 74-77, 79-82, 84-94 and 99-118 were pending.

Claims 35, 37, 51, 53, 54, 56, 69, 76, 84-87, 94 and 99-118 are currently being canceled, without prejudice or disclaimer of the inventions therein; claims 34, 40, 52, 55, 59-68, 70-72 and 88 are currently being amended; and new claim 119 is being added. Accordingly, claims 34, 36, 38-40, 42-47, 52, 55, 59-68, 70-72, 74-75, 77, 79-82, 88-93 and 119 are left for the Examiner's consideration, with claims 34, 40, 59, 66, 88 and 119 being independent.

Applicants respectfully request that the above amendments be entered before the claims are further examined.

A Notice of Allowance for this application was issued by the USPTO on October 7, 2003. After receiving the Notice of Allowance, Applicants' representative repeatedly contacted the Examiner in an attempt to get the Examiner to consider the references listed in the first and second IDSs (originally filed on October 8, 2002 and June 13, 2003, respectively) that were filed prior to receiving the Notice of Allowance. However, the Examiner informed Applicants' representative that the file was unavailable, and thus, that there was nothing that could be done. Because Applicants did not want a patent to issue without the references in the first and second IDSs being considered by the Examiner, Applicants filed an RCE to ensure that the patent did not go abandoned (and to give the Examiner an opportunity to initial the forms 1449, indicating consideration of the references in the first and second IDSs).

The RCE was filed on January 2, 2004, so that the first IDS, originally filed on October 8, 2002, and the second IDS originally filed on June 13, 2003, both of which were later re-filed on October 13, 2003, would be considered by the Examiner. When the RCE was filed, Applicants again enclosed therewith copies of the first and second IDSs, along with their corresponding date stamped post cards evidencing their original submission and their re-submission.

Applicants are now submitting a further IDS so that the Examiner can consider further references that have since come to the attention of Applicants.

Applicants respectfully request that the Examiner consider the references in each of the IDSs that have been submitted.

Applicants have amended many of the pending claims to differentiate these claims from those already allowed (and issued) in U.S. Patent No. 6,713,026 (issued from U.S. Patent Application No. 09/730,499).

The Examiner is respectfully requested to telephone the undersigned if he can assist in any way in expediting issuance of a patent.

The Commissioner is authorized to charge any underpayment or credit any overpayment to Deposit Account No. 06-1325 for any matter in connection with this response.

Respectfully submitted,

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